



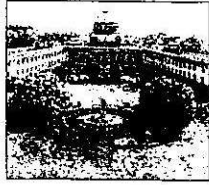
# DECCAN HERALD

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## One more step towards equal treatment

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The Supreme Court's latest directive on the grant of permanent commission in the armed forces to Short Service Commission (SSC) women officers and the observations made by the court in that context are reminders of the difficulties that women still face in getting equal treatment in the forces. The matter before the court was a petition filed by 86 senior women officers who had a genuine grievance about the arbitrary and unequal evaluation standards that they were judged with. The court found that the benchmarking of women officers with the officers lowest in merit in the corresponding male batch is arbitrary and irrational. It also found that the methodology adopted for evaluation of the annual confidential reports of women was unfair, and the application of "...rigorous medical standard at an



### A key verdict in equality in forces

advanced stage of their careers... disproportionately impacted them vis-à-vis their male counterparts". The court not only granted relief to those who were adversely affected but also directed a review of the method of evaluation of annual reports for future batches.

The importance of the judgement goes beyond the orders passed in the cases of the petitioners. The court's call to rectify the discriminatory system which ensured the rejection of women on medical grounds will help many lady officers to move forward in their careers. The court's important ruling of February 2020, which allowed full integration of SSC women into the defence services, including in combat positions, has not been implemented in letter and spirit. Women have done very well ever since they were allowed entry into the three services. They have worked in difficult terrains, done hazardous assignments and proved that they are no less than men. In the last six years, the strength of women officers in the three services has tripled to over 6,000 but their progress in the forces is still not a great and bright story.

Women had to battle at every stage of their progress and but for court orders it would have been much slower. This is because, as the court said, there is structural discrimination in the society "created by males and for males". Entrenched mindsets and attitudes hardly change in society and women have to fight for recognition as equals and for positions that are rightly their due. The court noted that as a result, certain structures that may seem to be the 'norm' and may appear to be harmless, are a reflection of the insidious patriarchal system. While this is so in society, it is much worse in the armed forces which have traditionally been totally dominated by men. The court's call to practice a real sense of equality in the true spirit of the Constitution is therefore very relevant.